

# Looking Forward for a Look Back

AN ARCHITECTURAL ICON RISES FROM THE ASHES A SECOND TIME



TOP, THE EXTERIOR OF FURNITURE MAKER GUSTAV STICKLEY'S HOUSE IN SYRACUSE BEFORE WORK BEGAN. A RENDERING SHOWS WHAT THE HOUSE WILL LOOK LIKE AFTER ITS RESTORATION. RIGHT, THE FRONT ENTRANCE.

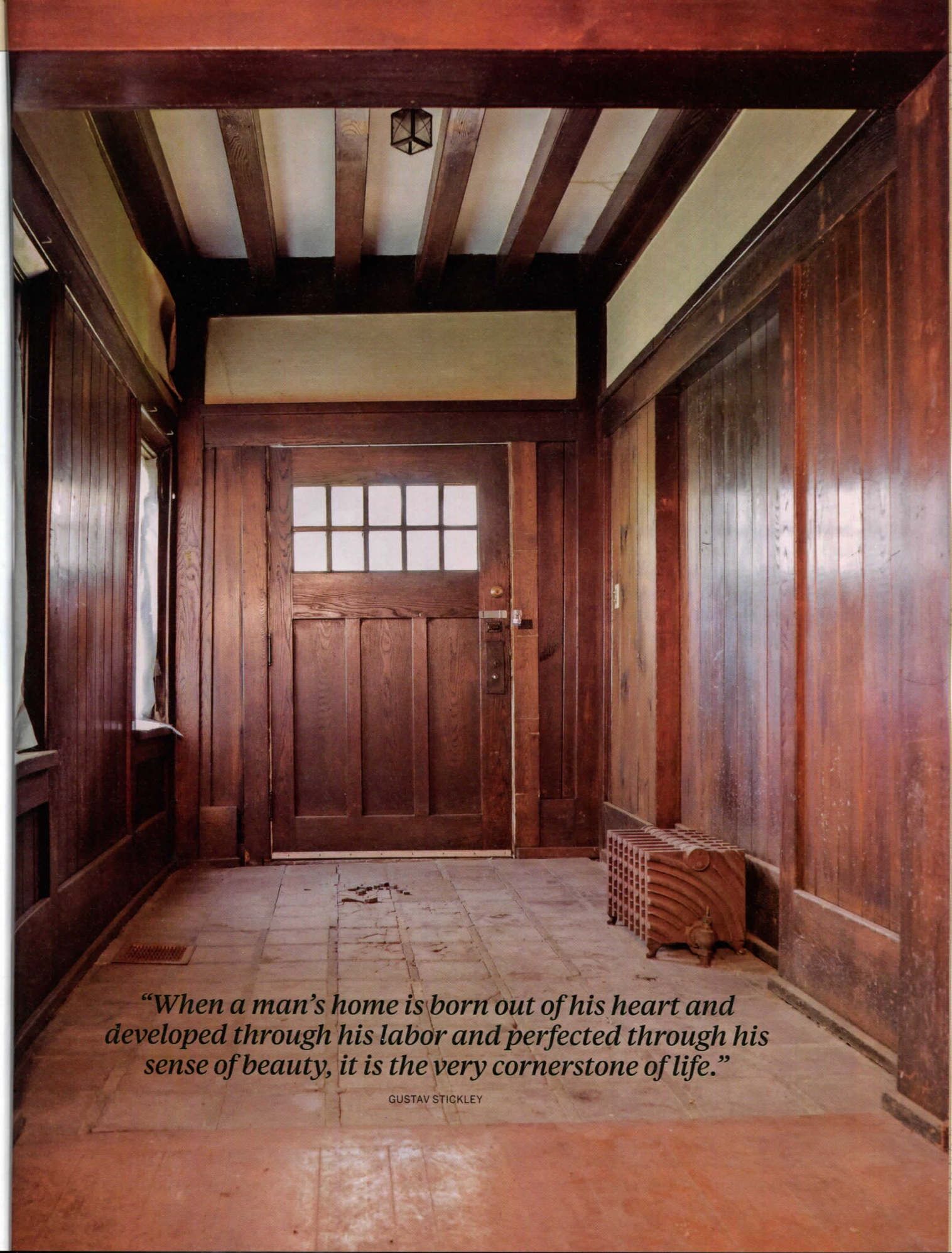
| BY AMY BLEIER LONG

**T**

he Gustav Stickley House — located at 438 Columbus Avenue in the Westcott neighborhood of Syracuse — was reborn in 1902, after a Christmas Eve fire the year prior gutted the interior. Famed furniture maker Gustav Stickley and his family lived in the Queen Anne Victorian and the destruction gave Stickley the opportunity to redesign the first and second floors in the American Arts & Crafts style he was pioneering. The interior, featuring rich chestnut paneling and a more open floor plan, is widely considered the first comprehensive residential Craftsman interior in the country.

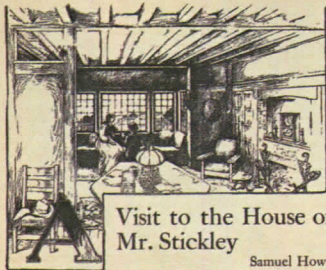
The family sold the house in 1911, but in 1919, one of Stickley's daughters, Barbara Stickley Wiles, bought it back. Stickley later moved in with his daughter and her family, living there until his death in 1942. Wiles sold the house in the early 1950s and it changed hands several times over the next 40 years. During that time, the property was divided into five apartments and the original Colonial Revival-style front porch was replaced with an unremarkable truncated version.

The efforts to preserve the house began roughly 25 years ago when David Rudd and a partner purchased it. Rudd, owner of Dalton's American ▶



*“When a man’s home is born out of his heart and developed through his labor and perfected through his sense of beauty, it is the very cornerstone of life.”*

GUSTAV STICKLEY



### Visit to the House of Mr. Stickley

Samuel Howe

**I** PURPOSE this month to extend somewhat farther the series of considerations with which, in the October number of this magazine, I opened my plea for a rehearing of the imminent and now all important question of securing appropriate and simple decorative elements for the modern house. In the former article I dealt mainly with the making of furniture in the workshops of The United Crafts at Eastwood, giving a glimpse of the daily life among the workers, briefly outlining the frank handling of well-prepared material, and in a general way citing those conditions of industry which have given such flavor to one of the most vital subjects of the present day. Now I write of the house itself, and I have selected the house of Mr. Stickley as an illustration, because it is so singularly free from pretension. It contains evidence of serious thought and honest intent, with abundant freshness and wholesomeness, which are innovations in these days of machine carving

Decorative Arts and Antiques on James Street, is nationally renowned as an expert in Craftsman-period furniture and objects. The project became a great financial burden and to avoid the valuable interior being sold off piecemeal, Rudd looked for a buyer who would understand the property's significance. He approached the Audi family, owners of the L. & J.G. Stickley Company, and they agreed to purchase the house. The company used the space for frequent photo shoots, but for a variety of reasons, was unable to move the restoration forward, though it maintained the house with basic repairs and kept the utilities on.

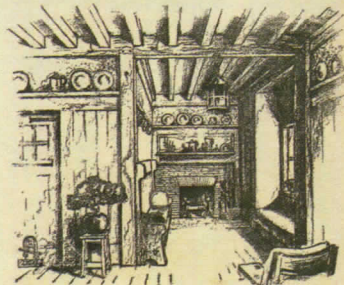
In 2012, Steven Kern, then-executive director at the Everson Museum of Art, and Beth Crawford, senior associate at Crawford & Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners, successfully applied for a \$500,000 grant to stabilize the structure, replace the roof, and restore the exterior. Progress stalled when the Everson sidelined the project for financial reasons; further years of vacancy took their toll and the house deteriorated.

Fortunately, the historic structure is being reborn again. Not wanting to lose the secured grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, a group of concerned neighbors, members of the city and county governments, Arts & Crafts enthusiasts



### A Visit to Mr. Stickley's House

No fiercer architectural battle has been fought than that in which the question of ornament supplies the field. Some ornament renews leadership. It affects to govern and not with a small voice, but with a shout. Not content to be seen, it must be heard. It eschews moderation. Assuming that collective ignorance represents dominant wisdom, it justifies its intolerance by its popularity.



Inglenook, Dining-room

The lovers of excessive and aggressive beauty clamor for more ornament, which grows as it goes, a snowball on a muddy road. Not alone is this house remarkable because of its conspicuous absence of carving, molding, and inlay by way of ornament, but because of the singularly frank manner in which they have been omitted. No false construction is allowed to take the place of

TOP LEFT, PAGE FROM SAMUEL HOWE'S FEATURE ON GUSTAV STICKLEY'S POST-FIRE RENOVATION, FROM THE DECEMBER 1902 ISSUE OF THE CRAFTSMAN MAGAZINE. LEFT, PAGE PROVIDING A DRAWING OF THE INGLENOOK; AN INGLENOOK IS A SMALL ROOM ADJOINING A FIREPLACE. TOP RIGHT, RECENT VIEW OF THE INGLENOOK.

preservationists, the Audis and non-profit organizations banded together to ensure the house's future. The group approached the University Neighborhood Preservation Association (UNPA), which had worked on the Babcock-Shattuck House, and asked if it would take on the grant and the first phase of a two-phase project.

UNPA exists to promote home ownership in the area east of Syracuse University, bordered by Comstock and Westmoreland Avenues and East Genesee and Broad Streets. "It's a little outside our mission, but we agreed to do it because, in terms of the neighborhood, restoration of a vacant house is always positive, says David Michel, past-president of UNPA.

L & J.G. Stickley Company donated the house in April 2016 to UNPA, who took title and appointed Michel as project manager.

The Gustav Stickley House Foundation, formed to plan for and aid in the restoration, preservation, and interpretation

of the house, spearheads fundraising. Led by president David Rudd, the foundation continues to identify and apply for grants. Funding so far has come from grants from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund, the NYS Homes and Community Renewal - Urban Initiatives, and numerous preservation- and Arts & Crafts-related organizations. Personal donations from all over the country, including descendants of Stickley, and fundraising events also support the ongoing effort. "I'm really happy to see this coming back into the public view and having people understand the importance of the interior," says Rudd.

Crawford came on as project manager and designer and also began the Historic Structure Report, an in-depth analysis of the history of the building, the structure and materials used. "We're looking at the evolution of the building: what it started out as, what the modifications were over the years, and how significant those mod-

ifications are," she says. Crawford's role has included some fascinating sleuthing: working with a conservator to detect the original Gustav-selected exterior paint colors, wallpaper and interior paint analysis and sourcing bricks for the chimney and front porch that exactly match the original bricks used on the house.

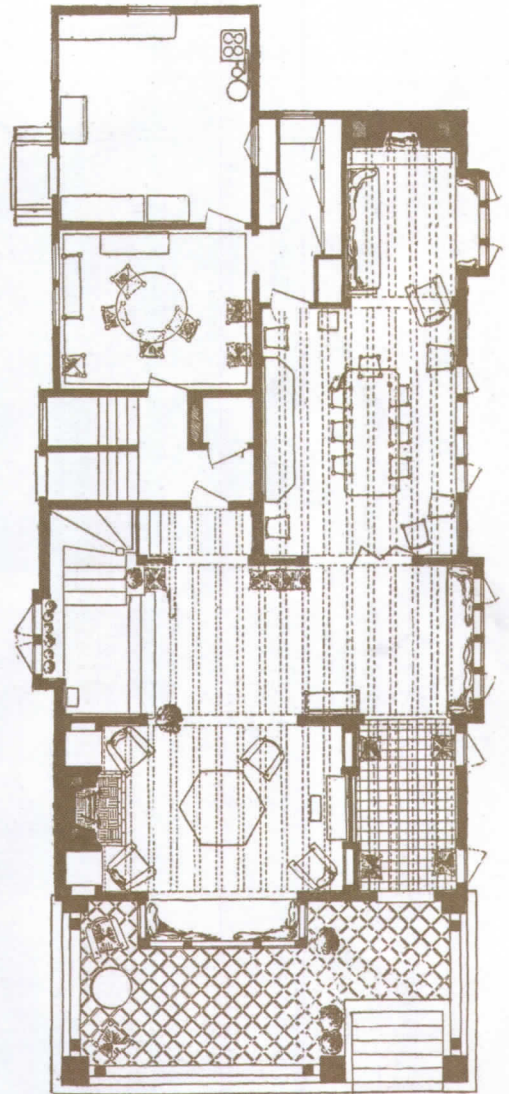
Phase I broke ground in August 2017, led by general contractor Gary Wright of CNY Builder Services, LLC, and focused on structural stability and the integrity of the exterior. Work including window restoration and reproduction, roof replacement, reconstruction of the porch, hazardous waste removal and masonry repair took place over the next several months. The discovery of more fire and water damage than was expected posed a challenge, as did raising up the house's northeast corner two inches. The estimated cost of phase I is just under \$680,000 and it is expected to wrap up this spring when ▶



PHOTOGRAPH BY GLORIA WRIGHT

DAVID MICHEL, SEATED, BETH CRAWFORD AND DAVID RUDD AT THE GUSTAV STICKLEY HOUSE ON COLUMBUS AVENUE.





First Floor Plan

GUSTAV STICKLEY III STANDS IN FRONT OF A RENDERING OF HIS GRANDFATHER GUSTAV STICKLEY'S HOUSE ON COLUMBUS AVENUE IN SYRACUSE ON AUG. 17, 2017. RESTORATION WORK ON THE HOME OF FAMOUS FURNITURE MAKER GUSTAV STICKLEY BEGAN LAST SUMMER.



TOP, A PAINT CONSERVATOR TAKES SAMPLES FROM THE EXTERIOR OF THE HOUSE. BOTTOM, A FIREPLACE IN A SECOND FLOOR BEDROOM IS SURROUNDED BY GRUEBY FAIENCE TILES.



exterior painting is completed.

The Onondaga Historical Association (OHA), under the direction of executive director Gregg Tripoli, was asked to take eventual ownership of the house and to develop a plan to operate and manage the house once completed. Preliminary plans outline a house museum and luxury boutique hotel to not only engage and enrich the community, but also provide a financially self-sustaining model for the building.

The restoration of the interiors will kick off when the necessary funds have been raised and UNPA transfers the title to OHA. The first floor will be public museum space, open by appointment, and the basement, second and third floors will house boutique hotel space and two apartments.



The museum will feature exhibits that feel inherent to the surroundings: paintings, decorative objects and China settings will change out periodically. Visitors will be able to fully immerse themselves in an experience true to what Stickley himself lived.

Although the museum will be docent-guided only, the facility will have hours comparable to OHA's other locations. Events and lectures will emphasize the history, culture, arts, fashion, architecture and figures of the Arts & Crafts heyday. One planned highlight will be living history demonstrations where guests can interact with "Gustav Stickley" and noted ceramicist "Adelaide Robineau."

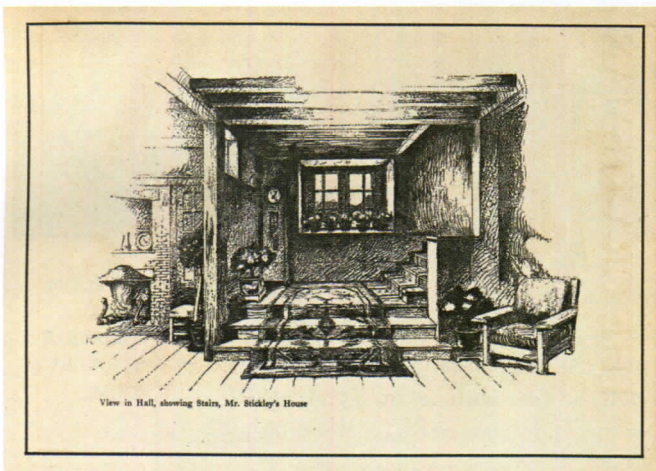
The boutique hotel experience will appeal to anyone fascinated by the Arts & Crafts movement, his-

tory, decorative arts and heritage tourism. A high-end concierge relationship will cater to guests' interests and encourage them to take advantage of the region's athletic, cultural, retail and culinary opportunities during their stay, contributing to the economic development of the community.

OHA has been working with the School of Architecture at Syracuse University, as well as architectural firms in the city, to develop plans for the second and third floors and basement to incorporate modern technology with period aesthetics. Building code requirements and accessibility concerns will also be addressed. OHA will bid out work for architects, general contractors and more niche specialty contractors as necessary.

THE FRONT ROOM  
ON THE FIRST  
FLOOR, FORMERLY  
GUSTAV STICKLEY'S  
LIVING ROOM.





TOP, THE CHESTNUT-WRAPPED STAIRWELL WAS ENCLOSED WHEN THE HOUSE WAS DIVIDED INTO SEPARATE APARTMENTS. BOTTOM, THE STAIRWELL, AS IT LOOKED IN 1902.

*To learn more or to contribute to the restoration fundraising efforts, please visit [gustavstickleyhousefoundation.org](http://gustavstickleyhousefoundation.org).*

The collaborative relationship between the OHA and the Stickley company will continue, with the furniture maker furnishing the restored interior. Some reproductions will be brought in, including pieces never put into mass production that Stickley designed for his house. Private donors have also contributed period pieces of furniture.

Though fundraising efforts will determine the exact timeline of phase II — estimates put the cost between \$1.6 and \$2 million — Tripoli hopes to open the space in 2020.

For those involved in the project, it's not just about Stickley; it's about neighborhoods and community. One of the collective goals is to use this restoration as a catalyst for continued revitalization of the surrounding blocks.

"In order to save something like this for the community, which is a tremendous source of pride for us, as well as a wonderful opportunity to educate the general public about who we are and what we've contributed to the world around us, we will need the community's help. So, we are counting on that in a big way," says Tripoli. ❖

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# About Gustav Stickley

Gustav Stickley was born Gustavus Stoeckel on March 9, 1858, in Osceola, Wisconsin, one of 11 children of Leopold and Barbara Schlager Stoeckel. In 1870, Stickley left school to work in his father's field of stonemasonry and help support his family. In 1876, Stickley's mother and siblings moved to Brandt, Pennsylvania, where Gustav worked in his uncle's chair factory — his first formal training in the furniture industry.

With his brothers Charles and Albert, Stickley formed Stickley Brothers & Company in 1883, the same year that he married Eda Ann Simmons. Within five years, the company was dissolved. Stickley formed a partnership, Stickley & Simonds, in

Binghamton with Elgin Simonds, a salesman in the furniture trade. During the 1890s, Stickley divided his efforts between his new enterprise and, with his brother Leopold, served as a foreman of furniture operations at the Auburn State Prison. In 1898, he parted ways with his business partner and formed the Gustav Stickley Company (he dropped the use of the "e" in 1903).

In 1900, he created his first Arts and Crafts works in an experimental line called the New Furniture. In 1901, he changed the name of his firm to United Crafts, issued a new catalogue written by Syracuse professor Irene Sargent, and began to offer middle-class consumers furniture designs in ammonia-fumed quartersawn white oak, as well as other mostly native woods.

In October 1901, Stickley published the first issue of *The Craftsman* magazine, an important vehicle for promoting Arts and Crafts philosophy, as well as products of his. Stickley's new furniture reflected his ideals of simplicity, honesty in construction and truth to materials. Surfaces were unadorned and the wood and mortise and tenon joinery was exposed to emphasize the structural qualities of the works. Hammered metal hardware emphasized the handmade qualities of furniture, which was fabricated using both hand techniques and modern woodworking machinery within Stickley's Eastwood factory.

In 1903, Stickley changed the name of his company again, to



the Craftsman Workshops, and began to market his works — by then including furniture as well as textiles, lighting and metalwork — as Craftsman products. Ultimately, more than 100 retailers across the United States represented the Craftsman Workshops.

Furthering the development of his concept of the Craftsman home, in late 1903 he announced the formation of the Craftsman Home Builders Club to provide architectural plans from *The Craftsman* to its subscribers. The homes were offered in several styles familiar to the American public — the farmhouse, town house, cottage and bungalow, among others.

Stickley moved his headquarters to New York City in 1905 and by 1907 began to acquire property to establish a boarding school for boys in what is now Parsippany, New Jersey. Lack of interest in the school prompted Stickley to live there with his family instead. By 1913, changing tastes and the financial strain of his new 12-story Craftsman Building in Manhattan, conceived as a department store, began to take their toll; in 1915 he filed for bankruptcy, stopping publication of *The Craftsman* in December 1916 and selling Craftsman Farms in 1917.

Gustav Stickley died on April 21, 1942. He is buried in the Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse.

In recent decades, Stickley and his work have become recognized once again. It is particularly his early furniture, produced between 1901 and 1904 that is considered rare and extremely collectible. In 1988, Barbra Streisand paid \$363,000 for a Stickley sideboard from the Gustav Stickley House in Syracuse. A major touring exhibition, "Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement," was on display in 2010 and 2011.

Gustav's brothers Leopold Stickley (Lee), Albert Stickley, Charles Stickley and John George Stickley also produced Arts and Crafts furniture. The L. & J.G. Stickley Company continues to operate in Manlius, producing furniture in a variety of styles, including reproductions of Arts and Crafts designs. ❖